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TAGS: [OVIP](#) [RICE](#) [CONDOLEEZZA](#) [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [ES](#)  
SUBJECT: (U) SECRETARY RICE'S SEPTEMBER 18, 2008  
CONVERSATION WITH SALVADORAN FOREIGN MINISTER ARGUETA

Classified By: WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas A. Shannon,  
Reasons 1.4.(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) September 18, 2008; 4:00 p.m.; Washington, DC.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
The Secretary  
A/S Thomas A. Shannon, WHA  
Deputy Spokesman Robert Wood, PA  
Hillary Thompson (Notetaker)

EL SALVADOR  
FM Marisol Argueta  
Charg Carmen Tobar  
Director General Werner Romero  
Astrid Moreno (Notetaker)

[1](#)3. (C) SUMMARY. Salvadoran FM Argueta met with Secretary Rice on September 18 during her visit to Washington to commemorate Salvadoran National Day. Arguing that the United States must treat their friends in the region better than they treat their enemies, FM Argueta requested assistance from the United States in the lead-up to the 2009 Salvadoran elections, where the governing National Republican Alliance party (ARENA) candidate is trailing his Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) opponent in the polls. She specifically requested that the United States send clear messages by extending Temporary Protected Status and through greater allocation of Merida resources to El Salvador. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)4. (U) FM Argueta also met with OAS Secretary General Insulza to request the OAS organize an election observation mission for the 2009 Salvadoran presidential elections and with Inter-American Development Bank President Luis Alberto Moreno to discuss how to best leverage remittances sent home by Salvadorans living in the United States.

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SALVADORAN ELECTIONS  
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[1](#)5. (C) FM Argueta detailed the Government of El Salvador's (GOES) concerns about a possible FMLN victory in the 2009 Salvadoran presidential elections. The GOES is having difficulty responding to the world-wide rise in cost of living and the increase in oil prices. Through Petrocaribe, other governments in the region are selling oil to consumers at a lower price. ARENA suspects that Venezuela has diverted approximate \$30 million in profits to the FMLN and can confirm that \$2 million was openly given to participating municipalities in El Salvador.

[1](#)6. (C) The Secretary underscored that the United States does not want a role in Salvadoran partisan politics, but supports democratic elections and democratic institutions. She noted that the Pathways to Prosperity meeting to be held next week at the United Nations would be a visible show of USG support for GOES policies and encouraged the GOES to expose those in El Salvador that do not support democratic ideals. FM Argueta noted the need for U.S. support as the 2009 elections

approach, detailing Salvadorans' positive image of the United States and American ideals. She suggested that the United States could send clear messages by highlighting linkages between the Government of El Salvador and U.S. values. FM Argueta specifically mentioned an extension of Temporary Protected Status and greater allocation of Merida resources to El Salvador as helpful signals that the USG could send to the Salvadoran people as signs of support for the GOES policies.

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IRAQ  
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¶7. (C) The Secretary thanked FM Argueta for El Salvador's contributions to the coalition in Iraq and expressed her desire that El Salvador will decide to continue to contribute forces into 2009. She noted that El Salvador should be proud of their troops and described the progress that is taking shape in Iraq. Foreign Minister Argueta agreed that El Salvador is indeed proud of its armed forces and reiterated that the GOES views their contribution to the coalition as an opportunity to thank the United Nations, as well as the United States, for their assistance during El Salvador's time of need. Argueta noted that the Iraq coalition meeting at the UN in New York next week would be a good opportunity for President Bush and President Saca to share notes on El Salvador's contribution to the Global War on Terror.

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COMALAPA  
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¶8. (C) FM Argueta relayed that El Salvador is ready to sit down with a U.S. team to discuss extension of the agreement that allows for U.S. presence at the Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in Comalapa. Noting the current political environment in the lead-up to El Salvador's 2009 elections, Assistant Secretary Shannon underlined the USG's concerns about modifying the current agreement, which would require Salvadoran legislative approval. Instead, he highlighted that the best approach would be to extend the current agreement for five years and begin conversations regarding a possible expansion only after the presidential elections. FM Argueta suggested that increased U.S. financial assistance to the CSL would be another sign of USG support for the GOES while also enabling more successful counternarcotics operations from Comalapa.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS  
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¶9. (C) FM Argueta stressed El Salvador's concern over recent events in Venezuela and Bolivia, as well as uncertainty in Honduras. She encouraged the Secretary to deliver a clear response. The Secretary remarked that El Salvador should expect to see a strong response to Bolivia's expulsion of the U.S. Ambassador, but that the USG has decided that it is better not to play by Chavez's rules. She noted the deteriorating domestic circumstances in both countries. FM Argueta also raised her unease over a growing Iranian presence in the region and the linkages between Venezuela, Iran, Hezbollah, and the FARC in Colombia. The Secretary agreed that Venezuela is a danger, but strongly urged the Central Americans to push back against Iranian intervention in the region. She encouraged the Foreign Minister to stress to the Salvadoran people that Iran has its own problems at home and cannot do anything for El Salvador.

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EVENTS IN YEMEN  
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¶10. (C) Argueta conveyed the GOES' condolences over the attack in Yemen. The Secretary commented that our investments in embassy security had paid off. She noted her pleasure at Yemen's quick response.

RICE